

## Introduction

These rubrics have been designed as guidance for teachers who are developing MYP units of work. There is no standard way in which the rubrics should be used other than to provide clarity and guidance for the first stage of unit planning. *MYP: From principles into practice* (August 2008) states that schools choosing not to use the MYP unit planner must use the processes of planning inherent in it.

Therefore, these rubrics will apply to **all** unit planners in MYP schools.

## The planning stages

The MYP unit planner is made up of three parts.

- Stage 1, which is derived from the content
- Stage 2, which is content specific
- Reflective stage, which encompasses stage 1 and stage 2 and applies for the duration of teaching the planner and extends beyond

The following rubrics apply to stage 1 of the planner.

## Rubrics for stage 1

This stage can be summed up as the integration of the key elements of creating MYP units of work, which always includes the following four steps:

- choosing a significant concept(s) for the unit
- determining an area of interaction focus
- developing an MYP unit question that is specifically appropriate to the developmental age of the students
- developing and specifying the process of summative assessment that will determine the students' level of achievement.

Stage 1 ensures that units are in line with MYP philosophy and requirements; the stage is derived from subject-specific content.

## Significant concept

In the MYP the significant concept is considered the big idea of the unit that brings focus and depth and leads students towards enduring understandings. Upon consideration of the subject-specific content and concepts to be taught in an MYP unit, it is very likely that one big idea or concept will emerge. In order to articulate the big idea as a significant concept it is important that teachers understand what constitutes a significant concept in the MYP.

The significant concept identifies the essential understandings that students **should** retain in the future and become the notions and principles applied to solve problems and issues relevant to their lives. Significant concepts are timeless and universal (Erickson, 2008), and refer to a big idea that is “an abstract, transferable concept, theme or process at the heart of a subject. It gives meaning and connection to discrete facts and skills” (Wiggins and McTighe, 1998).

Erickson (2008) demonstrates this point by explaining that there are two types of concepts: the first type arising from the subject material with the other drawn out of the subject's craft, the features and processes of the subject. In literature she gives the example of the concepts of family, love and conflict arising out of the themes of literature, whereas other concepts are drawn from the writer's craft, for example, when character, symbolism, allegory and foreshadowing are used to convey meaning or create effect.

Concepts are not skills; skills are the tools to help students engage with, and respond to, the concepts. In the MYP a significant concept may present itself as a theory, a principle, a generalization, or a process.

When developing a unit, the teacher will start by considering all the concepts that will be taught. By listing these concepts, teachers will reflect upon the underlying (or overarching) concept they want their students to remember and apply in the long term. This will then become the significant concept or big idea for the unit and will be written as a statement, as demonstrated in the examples below.

Consider the following examples to illustrate how the significant concept stems from the subject-specific content to be taught.

- Language helps us to build relationships (taken from a language A literature unit).
- An understanding of decimals helps with everyday situations (mathematics).
- Love is complex and comes in different forms (taken from a language A short stories unit).
- Form affects function in everyday life (technology).
- Power can be both social and personal. Inequality and the abuses of power lead to conflict (taken from a language A novel study unit).

- Shape and angle impact on human environments (mathematics).
- Understanding our own cultural identity enables us to accept others' (taken from a language A poetry unit).
- Good design makes life easier (technology).
- What we wear and how we speak reflect our identity, the image we have of ourselves and others have of us (language B).
- We are responsible for our own health and fitness. This requires us to make lifestyle choices (physical education).
- Government policy can influence the health of its people (humanities).
- All change involves a new way of thinking (taken from an interdisciplinary visual art and humanities unit).
- Contexts (historical/social/political) affect the way music is created (performing arts).
- Ecosystems can be fragile and resilient (sciences).
- Electric and magnetic forces form the basis of many modern technologies (sciences).

Now consider these examples showing how the significant concept is drawn from the subject's processes.

- Scientific discovery can be based upon testing hypotheses (sciences).
- An author uses symbolism to convey meaning (language A).
- Words and images combined can create powerful communication (language B).
- Simple expressions can represent complex real-life phenomena (mathematics).
- Language changes its structure depending on purpose and audience (language B).
- Every language has a form that makes it unique (language A or language B).
- Cooperation and teamwork are vital elements to success (physical education).
- By understanding flight, balance and rotation we can improve the quality of our sequencing. Complexity increases when we apply these concepts (physical education).
- Scientists use empirical evidence to draw conclusions (sciences).
- Historians select and use evidence in support of their explanations of historical change (humanities).
- Historians reach different conclusions by using sources in different ways (humanities).
- Musical terminology helps us communicate about music (performing arts).

The following could be questions for determining the significant concept.

- Is it grounded in the subject? Does it reflect essential disciplinary understanding?
- Does it respond to the questions "why" or "so what"?
- Can it be formulated in terms of: "It is important for students to understand that ..."?
- Do teachers from other disciplines recognize it as a significant concept?

In certain cases, significant concepts can transcend the subject to become macro-concepts, and could possibly be used in other subjects, making for an authentic “interdisciplinary connection” for an MYP unit of work. Where this occurs it provides an opportunity for other subject-area teachers to collaborate more easily in the creation of an interdisciplinary unit.

Descriptor	Level
The significant concept(s) statement <b>fails to identify</b> a significant concept that is a big idea grounded in the subject. Either the concept is <b>disconnected</b> from the subject or it focuses solely on subject-specific <b>knowledge, skills or attitudes</b> .	0
The significant concept(s) is apparent <b>only on close analysis</b> of the concept statement. Close inspection is needed to determine how the significant concept is grounded in the subject. Either the concept <b>appears to be disconnected</b> from the subject or the emphasis is largely on subject-specific <b>knowledge, skills or attitudes</b> .	1
The significant concept(s) is apparent from the concept statement. It is identifiably grounded in the subject although this might <b>not be immediately evident</b> . Some subject-specific <b>knowledge, skills or attitudes</b> may be included inappropriately.	2
The significant concept(s) is <b>easily identified</b> from the concept statement. It is <b>evidently</b> grounded in the subject without identifying subject-specific <b>knowledge, skills or attitudes</b> .	3

## The areas of interaction

The areas of interaction provide the contexts for learning; they are the ways in which the unit’s content is made relevant to students. *MYP: From principles into practice* (August 2008) states that teachers should choose one area of interaction for each unit. Approaches to learning skills are present in all units and are part of stage 2 of the planning process. If the unit content is explicitly concerned with learning, then approaches to learning might be appropriate in stage 1, for example, if the unit question is related to the student developing some sort of teaching or learning method.

The significant concept is put into a meaningful context through the use of one of the areas of interaction. The different perspectives of the areas of interaction could lead to a different focus and different unit question. The teacher should choose the area of interaction that is most appropriate by reviewing the school’s area of interaction student learning expectation planning documentation.

Once the area of interaction has been determined, its focus must be stated. This is an explicit indication of how the area of interaction will guide both teacher and student inquiry using the significant concept to make the actual subject content of the unit relevant to students.

Descriptor	Level
There is <b>little or no attempt</b> to show how student learning can be enhanced by the integration of any area of interaction.	0
<b>More than one</b> area of interaction is identified, which provide <b>little more than “links”</b> to the unit’s significant concept. Multiple directions are implied—or some ideas are provided—for student inquiry, although these may have <b>little relevance</b> to the significant concept.	1
<b>One</b> area of interaction is stated. There is a <b>weak connection</b> that can be made with the identified significant concept. There is <b>an attempt</b> to show how teachers and students might use the area for inquiry, although the connections <b>might not be clear</b> .	2
<b>One</b> area of interaction is stated and forms the context of the <b>entire unit</b> . It has <b>clear connections</b> with the identified significant concept. The area of interaction focus <b>guides</b> both teacher and student inquiry into the significant concept in a meaningful context.	3

## MYP unit question

The MYP unit question is developed by integrating the significant concept with the area of interaction context in the form of a student-centred question; it specifically engages students, bringing an authentic context to their learning.

The question will need to be developed so that it satisfies the criteria proposed in the “Planning for teaching and learning” section of *MYP: From principles into practice* (August 2008). In this sense, if the question is “significant” it may contribute towards cross-curricular understanding. However, this is not always necessary. The unit question may have a single-discipline conceptual focus and still be significant.

Use a best-fit approach to the rubric below in determining a level.

Open-ended	Relevant and engaging	Challenging and provocative	Level
The question:	The question:	The question:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>is “closed”, requiring a yes/no response (typical questions start with “can”, “does”, “should”, “do”, “will”).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>does not provide for student involvement</li> <li>fails to interest students</li> <li>is irrelevant to students’ lives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>does not seek to extend students’ capacities for new understandings.</li> </ul>	0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>presumes that the answer could be known in advance, looked up or easily derived without serious thinking.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>is isolated from students’ prior knowledge and experience</li> <li>is phrased in adult language and adult thinking</li> <li>provides for little student interest</li> <li>has little relevance to students’ lives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>provides few opportunities for students to develop their understandings or skills</li> <li>requires a response based on factual recall or the simple stating of an opinion that has little depth</li> <li>is teacher-centred or text-centred.</li> </ul>	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>requires a response that is likely to be the same from student to student</li> <li>has boundaries set by the teacher.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>attempts to make connections to students’ prior learning</li> <li>is a “simplified” version of an “adult question”</li> <li>requires some student involvement</li> <li>is connected to an aspect of students’ lives, although it may not be age-appropriate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>seeks a limited extension of student knowledge and understanding</li> <li>provides some opportunities for students to increase their understandings and competencies.</li> </ul>	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>is “open” (typical questions start with “how”, “why”)</li> <li>is designed so that students can explore a variety of possibilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>assumes a degree of prior knowledge and experience</li> <li>“hooks” student interest in an age-appropriate manner</li> <li>is phrased in student-friendly language</li> <li>provides ways for students to be actively involved</li> <li>encourages students to consider the unit’s significant concept and to reflect on it in the context of their adolescent world.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>seeks to extend prior knowledge and understandings</li> <li>provides for varied ways in which students can increase their understandings and competencies</li> <li>could contain an unfamiliar significant concept that requires “unpacking”.</li> </ul>	3

# Assessment

## Culminating task

Teachers are required to develop a culminating assessment task for each MYP unit. A culminating task will provide students with further opportunities to demonstrate their learning in an authentic situation.

A culminating task will allow students an opportunity to respond to the MYP unit question. It is critically important that teachers consider how students will be able to demonstrate their understanding of the significant concept or big idea.

Teachers must think as moderators, asking themselves the following questions.

- “What will constitute acceptable evidence of understanding?”
- “How will students show that they have engaged with the unit question and significant concept?”
- “How will students show what they have understood about the significant concept or big idea?”

When teachers are in stage 1 of the planner, assessment is the process of determining for each student a level of achievement in the assessment criteria. Teachers will bring together information they have on student learning to build a picture of where each student sits on the level of achievement scales. Teachers are not confined to using just one assessment task in each MYP unit of work—they should use data taken from a range of assessments.

Descriptor	Level
The culminating task does <b>not</b> provide opportunities for students to <b>engage</b> with the unit question and significant concept embedded in it and to demonstrate their understanding of the concept, skills and subject-specific knowledge.	0
The culminating task provides students with <b>limited opportunities</b> to demonstrate their understanding of the significant concept and respond to the unit question; the <b>emphasis</b> is on demonstrating developed skills and knowledge only. Students are directed to communicate their learning in one way. The task requires students to use a <b>limited range</b> of approaches to learning skills and subject knowledge that have few connections with the objectives that frame the unit.	1
The culminating task allows students <b>some</b> opportunities to demonstrate their understanding of the significant concept and respond to the unit question, although it may seem <b>prescriptive</b> and <b>restrict student options</b> . The task requires students to use approaches to learning skills and selected subject-specific knowledge, <b>some of which</b> may be represented in the objectives framed by the unit.	2
The culminating task is <b>open-ended</b> and designed for students to demonstrate their understanding of the significant concept and respond to the unit question. The task gives students the opportunity to communicate approaches to learning skills developed and objectives reached through the unit, as well as subject-specific knowledge identified in stage 2 of the planner.	3

## References

Erickson, HL. 2008. *Stirring the Head, Heart, and Soul*. Corwin Press, USA.

Wiggins, G and McTighe, J. 1998. *Understanding by Design*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. 0-87120-313-8.